

# SPECTACULAR CAREER OF CONFEDERATE WAR SPY

At the present moment there are in the possession of the Chamberlain of the city of New York two canvas bags which contain \$5,000 in gold. This fortune is waiting for the heirs or next of kin to René Gautier to come forward and claim it, but unless some one can be found who can tell who this René Gautier was it is unlikely that the heirs will ever be discovered and the money will eventually be escheated to the State and turned over to the State Treasurer at Albany.

René Gautier was a Frenchman who operated as a spy for the Confederate government during the War of the Rebellion, and the story of his career, as it has been unearthed by investigators who have been trying to find the legitimate claimants to what he left, reads like that of a character in a "thrilling shocker." He was born somewhere in France, but the exact location of the place cannot be given, because little or nothing is known of his early life or of his family. In fact, it is not even certain that "Gautier" was his right name. He turned up in New York in the summer of 1864 and presented himself, unaccompanied, to a boarding house kept by Mme. Sophie Picteer at No. 1,257 Broadway. She took him without question as a lodger. The fact that he was a Frenchman was recommended enough. Toward the other lodgers the new boarder was at all times friendly, but never intimate, and they knew him only as a pleasant mannered and intelligent man who was interested in a patent something of the kind. He did not work, but he had plenty of money, nevertheless.

Mme. Picteer, in the way of most landladies, was inquisitive about her new boarder and in a tactful manner she set about finding out something definite concerning his past. She learned that he was a widower whose wife had died two years before he arrived in New York, and a child had also died previous to his leaving France. He was, he said, twenty-nine years old. His reason for coming to this country was to dispose of the American rights to a new French invention for the manufacturing of an excellent imitation of stained glass at a very reasonable figure.

By way of digression he told her that a brother of his had been killed by a bomb explosion that was part of an attempt on the life of Louis Napoleon in 1848. Besides the knowledge that he was in correspondence with a sister who was living in Paris, these were all the facts that Mme. Picteer was able to obtain concerning him. His statement in regard to a patent was truthful, though she had no means of verifying it at the time. It has since been learned, however, that he negotiated with a company in Boston for the sale of the patent and made an agreement the terms of which provided that he was to receive for it \$5,000. One-half of this sum was to be paid to him on January 1, 1865, and the other half on May 1 of the same year.

When the new year came around he received the first payment from Boston,



As He Rushed In He Found Gautier Lying Across the Bed. Life Was Extinct.

\$4,000 in gold, which at that time was almost equivalent to \$8,000, because gold was at a premium. Mme. Picteer knew that the money had come to him, but he did not tell her its source, and her curiosity was further aroused when he told her that he expected another sum of money in six months. He said that after receiving the second sum he would return to Paris and would make his home with his sister. But immediately after

he got the initial payment he left her boarding house and moved to that kept by Mr. Addison P. Smith, at No. 219 West Forty-eighth street. Not long after this he called at the office of William S. Charney, a broker, doing business at No. 34 Wall street, and arranged to buy through Charney some government bonds. By February 10 the broker had sold him \$7,000 worth.

It was about this time that the Secret

Service agents of the government at Washington became possessed of information that led them to suspect that René Gautier was a Confederate spy. From then on they closely watched his movements and intercepted his mail. Gautier was a clever man and it did not take him long to discover the scrutiny under which he was living. This discovery made him very nervous.

It so happened that a brother of Gan-

tier's new landlord, Addison P. Smith, was a Secret Service agent, and advantage was taken of this relationship to get a better line on the suspected man's actions. Consequently the agent went to New York from Washington ostensibly to spend a month's vacation at the home of his brother in the Forty-eighth street house. He arrived there on Saturday, February 14, 1865. Only a few hours after his arrival every one in the boarding house knew that a Secret Service man was living under the brother's roof. Among the first to learn this fact was the young French-

man, Gautier, and he was so affected by the news that he secluded himself in his room. He did not come down to supper on Saturday evening, nor did he come out at any time during the night. Breakfast time came Sunday morning, but still he remained closeted, and then toward noon came the sound of two pistol shots from behind his door. Every one in the house immediately made for his room. The Secret Service man was the first to reach the door, and, finding it locked, he battered it down. As he rushed in he found Gautier lying across the bed. Life was extinct. There were two wounds in the body, one in the head and another in the

breast. A smoking revolver had slipped from his right hand and lay on the floor, and beside him on a chair lay two bags containing more than \$4,000 in gold.

Some of the above facts were brought to light at the Coroner's inquest, which was held one week after the suicide, but others were discovered only recently when detectives unearthed the almost forgotten case and found new evidence. Before the body was buried search was started for relatives of the dead man, but nothing came of it. No one was found then or since who had a legitimate claim to the cash that was found beside the body, and when it became apparent that no one would be traced, at least for some time, the Public Administrator took charge of his effects. After funeral expenses and other bills were paid there still remained \$3,337. This sum was banked and has increased materially during the intervening years. The Boston company which had bought Gautier's patent, gaffed by his death, for when the second payment fell due, there was no authorized person to receive it. Should the man's heirs ever be found a large sum can be collected by them from this company for the use of the stained glass process since 1865.

The fact that the government's Secret Service agents had been on his trail was not made public at the time of Gautier's death. Publicity was something to be avoided, because they wanted to trap the persons with whom the man had been co-operating. The letters in the series that he had been receiving at Smith's boarding house, and which had been intercepted, were all unsigned and were postmarked at Philadelphia, Paris, Troy, New York, Montreal and other places, but the evidence that they furnished had not quite constituted grounds on which to base his arrest. For a week or so after he killed himself, they continued to arrive at his Forty-eighth street address, and ceased without the authorities having been able to identify or trace their senders. Thus all chances of finding out who Gautier was were ended in so far as that line of investigation was concerned.

The search for his sister or other heirs has been carried on extensively in France. Many families bearing the name Gautier have been canvassed and many church and municipal records have been gone over, but these efforts have not been fruitful. The mystery surrounding his identity is as much a mystery to-day as it was on February 15, 1865. Who was he? Who and where are his heirs? Who were the persons with whom he was in communication as a spy?

## NEXT WEEK.

The missing Desmond family. Daniel J. Desmond, Papal Consul, died leaving \$20,000. His family moved to New York from Philadelphia, but the estate has never been settled because his daughter, who had possession of the will, dropped out of sight. Six other members of the family have also mysteriously disappeared.

# Reformed Bank Burglar, Reared in Luxury, Who Once Answered the Call of the Underworld

RECORDED as one of the most desperate bank and post office burglars that ever blasted a safe, a man known to the authorities in the country over as "Gentleman Sam" is now holding a responsible position in a New York hotel, his reformation, according to himself and friends, full and complete. Sam, as he will be called here, has buried his past and the many aliases under which he operated so effectively that even the police, who so relentlessly pursued him for years, are eager to give him a chance to prove that he intends to stick to the straight and narrow path, and guard zealously the secret of his identity.

The reformed bank burglar and slayer—for he once killed a man while seeking to escape from a posse that pursued him—is now employed by a big hotel within a stone's throw of Broadway. There he was found by the writer a few days ago in the act of assigning a new arrival to the room he had just engaged.

"A long term in prison convinced me," Sam said when comfortably seated at a table, with a sparkling glass of mineral water before him, "that honesty is the best policy, after all. I have, first and last, handled thousands of dollars, all of which, until a year ago, I got by sharp practice or by violence. When I needed money I never permitted any obstacle to stand between me and its acquisition. If it was necessary to knock a man on the head to strip him of his wallet I promptly and unhesitatingly delivered the blow. If it was necessary to resort to even more violent tactics I still went ahead with the job—but I always got the money. That was the paramount issue, and in those days I needed lots of it for it was 'come easy, go easy,' and I always was regarded as a big spender."

"But those days are dead and buried now, and I don't want to recall them. You know my record as well as I do, so what's the use of my attempting to relate to you what you already know? You would only think I was trying to cover up or prove that there were extenuating circumstances surrounding my acts. I will tell you this much, however. I was the son of wealthy parents. I was reared in luxury and was never denied a thing I craved. Money was lavished upon me, and as I look back upon it now that seems the cause of my downfall. Educated at fashionable private schools and later at one of the big Eastern colleges, I was graduated—to learn that I had been pampered and spoiled, and when I walked forth to what I expected to be a life of pleasure, luxury and idleness I found my father had been stripped of his fortune. Evidently there was something lacking in my moral stamina, for

when I realized that it was necessary for me to go to work in order to gain even a modest livelihood the thought was so revolting that I loafed and mooned around until I found myself a beggar—penurious, but with an appetite and craving for all I once had possessed.

"Naturally, with such principles it was an easy step into circles of society far below that stratum in which I had been reared. I avoided my old-time associates and sought new friends, made in the underworld. The men I met there, who, I was told, were reaping harvests by nefarious means, most certainly were no smarter than I. If they could get money so easily, surely I could do likewise, and this I determined to do, and that speedily. Well, it came my way, even easier than I had supposed, and before long I was in funds again, but somehow I had no inclination to lead a double life. It would have been an easy matter for me to disappear and stay away until I had replenished my purse, and then reappear among my old college friends and hold up my end with the most affluent of them. But since I had chosen a life of crime I concluded that I would cultivate a new circle of friends, and they must all be of the same ilk—criminals just as deft as myself. It's all over now, thank Heaven, so I shan't tell you of the years that followed. Any well regulated police headquarters in this country can give you data bearing on my career fuller and more ample than I could furnish you offhand."

"Gentleman Sam" in police parlance was not only a "bad lot," but an exceptionally smart thief. When he elected a career of crime he fell in with a number of second story men and sneak thieves in Bowery resorts, and in a few weeks he was one of the most active in their clan. He prospered, but, as he later told a detective, he found this line of adventure too tame, so he drifted from their ranks into those of regiments, with whom he had made one or two successful sorties on post office and small town bank safes. As a yeoman Sam proved an instantaneous success.

Realizing that the ripest fields were in the South, he made a trip through Virginia and West Virginia, and as a consequence a trail of wrecked safes was left in his wake. The hunt for this little band—for there were only four in it—grew so hot that they left the balmy air of the Southland for the more rigorous clime of Canada, where they continued their operations unmolested.

But Sam was doomed to return in a few years, for the adventures he met with on that trip resulted in his shooting his way from the grasp of the angry posse that pursued after he had shot down a bank watchman, his ultimate capture and



Standing Over the Prostrate Body, Sent Several Shots Into It.

long incarceration in prison, awaiting the trial which proved a fiasco.

Having explored the banks and post offices of the South and North, Sam elected a new itinerary. He decided that he would go West and seek an entirely new field for his pending operations. This was easily accomplished, for he still

had enough funds left after his farewell feast to afford a first class ticket on a fast train to Chicago.

Evidently his reputation as a successful and daring yeoman had preceded him, for he was royally welcomed into the inner circle of Chicago's criminal

elect, and before many days had elapsed his operations for the immediate future were mapped out. This programme included the looting of a chain of small town post offices and half a dozen banks.

The strong boxes of these various institutions readily yielded their respective

boards into his itching palms, and he was well supplied with money when he returned to Chicago. Pushing his way further West, he met with equal success, until the old longing for Broadway overcame him, and he decided to return to the East. He went as far as Buffalo; decided to stop over there a day or two to meet several old cronies, and this proved his undoing.

The men he met in Buffalo beseeched him to join them in a little bank job not far away, and they gave him such glowing accounts of the big amount of money reposing in its strong box that he yielded and decided to postpone his visit to New York for a few days that he might pick up this "easy money" and thus reinforce the already big sum he had "planted" and with which he had expected to dazzle his old New York friends.

In discussing this raid, Sam beseeched the writer not to mention the name of the town where the most thrilling and at the same time the most dastardly deed in his life of crime was executed.

"There are several men in that town whose faith in me is unbounded," Sam said. "In fact, two of them made it possible for me to get the position I am now holding, and I am afraid if they see what you intend to write about me they will think I am either yearning for the old life or else I am boasting about it. They may withdraw their interest in me, and Heaven knows I don't want to fall back in the old ways."

In any event Sam and his cronies went to the little town in the upper part of New York State and close to the Canadian border. They reconnoitred and found the surroundings just as advantageous for the robbery of the bank and their flight as they had been told. According to Sam, the conditions were "ideal" and everything looked so "easy" that, as he expressed it, "it seemed like a shame to take the money."

Sam was an expert "safe man." He had mastered the intricacies of making and applying explosives, and he also was deft with the drill and jimmy. It was well toward three o'clock on the morning of a dreary and murky November day. Not a soul was stirring, even the town watchman having turned into a sheltering haven to escape the muck and chilling fog. The bank was not wired with burglar alarms, so ingress was simply a question of jimmying a rear window. Sam was the first to scramble through the opening, one accompanying him and two remaining on the outside to do picket duty.

It required but one blast of the nitroglycerine to send the door of the safe starting from its hinges. The inner door was drilled, and in a twinkling the strong

box was exposed, with its board of greenbacks and gold. There, before them, lay \$87,000; and there was none to say them nay!

The money was quickly transferred from the safe to the pockets of the yeomen, and "Gentleman Sam" scrambled through the window with more money in his possession than he had ever had at any one time before.

As Sam and his inside confederate slunk from beyond the shadow of the bank they noticed that the "gay cats," or look-outs, had disappeared. This did not necessarily alarm them, although they thought it strange. They had proceeded but one short block from the bank when a shot rang out, and Sam's companion sank with a groan, a bullet having pierced his arm. He was quickly on his feet again, however, and he and Sam simultaneously drew their revolvers and stood ready to fire the moment the person who had just shot showed himself. They had not long to wait, for a head peered from behind a sheltering corner, and as a little spit of flame belched from his owner's revolver Sam and his companion both fired. Then for a few minutes a lively fusillade of shots followed, and as the man who had surprised the yeomen fell writhing with a bullet in his groin Sam and his fellow yeeg ran to his side and, standing over the prostrate body, sent several shots into it. It was afterward learned that any one of those shots would have proved fatal.

By this time scores of men came running from all directions, and all were armed. Shot followed shot, and Sam and his confederate sped through the streets to the outskirts of the town, and both were slightly wounded more than once by the bullets that rained in their wake. Despite this handicap, Sam's companion escaped. Left in the lurch, Sam quickly reloaded his two revolvers and, taking refuge in an old barn, stood off the posse until at an auspicious moment he made a break for the open and sped to the railroad tracks, where he quickly disappeared down a steep embankment and thence into a dense thicket.

His reformation, he asserts, was effected while in prison, and he now declares that nothing could tempt him to transgress in the slightest degree, since he has never known what real happiness and contentment were until he found he was able to earn an honest living.

He is married now, and his wife and little girl adore him. He swears that he told his sweetheart everything connected with his past before he gave her consent to marry him. He has implicit faith in him and his little girl are for him, and which will ever direct him on his path of righteousness.